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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASMARA 000027

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SUBJECT: CODEL PAYNE MEETS SOMALI ARS REPRESENTATIVES

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for Reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (U) Summary. On January 4 CODEL Payne met with five representatives of the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia (ARS) at the Intercontinental Hotel in Asmara. ARS members stated their views of U.S. policies in the Horn of Africa, the reasons for and consequences of the Ethiopian invasion, and international terrorism. The ARS members also submitted a plan for bringing peace to Somalia. CODEL Payne solicited the ARS position on four questions. End Summary.

¶2. (U) CODEL Payne was represented by Congressman Donald Payne of New Jersey and Ted Dagne of the Congressional Research Service. ARS participants were: Central Committee Chairman Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed (Sharif), former Member of Parliament Dr. Zakaria M. Haji Abdi (Zakaria), Secretary for Political and Foreign Affairs Yusuf Hassan Ibrahim (Dheeg), Central Committee Member Ahmed Abdihashi (Ahmed), and Vice Chairman Jama Mohamed Ghalib (Ghalib).

¶3. (C) Sharif claimed he would like the USG to be more of a stakeholder in Somalia and asserted he did not know the bombers of the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam nor their whereabouts. He questioned why the USG has excellent relations with other Muslim countries but not Somalia, claiming Somalia's problems stem from failed U.S. policies in the region. Sharif also suggested that the Ethiopian invasion and installation of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was an attempt to paralyze the country and derail this process. CODEL Payne noted many other countries have successfully overcome external manipulation and listed several of Somalia's internally caused issues.

¶4. (C) Sharif submitted an ARS peace plan for Somalia: 1) the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Ethiopian forces, 2) the withdrawal of all African Union (AU) troops, 3) a conference to establish a new transitional government, 4) the international community to support the outcome of the conference, and 5) an international commission of inquiry into war crimes with the perpetrators, including U.S. officials, brought to justice. Sharif said there could be no peace without the consent of all parties regarding the composition and deployment of foreign troops in Somalia. Zakaria added that in the interim the TFG should return to Baidoa and allow the ARS to deploy in Mogadishu; the status quo prior to the Ethiopian invasion. He noted this was the

basis of any negotiation. A new conference would then be held to create a transitional government, with representatives coming from major Somali stakeholders rather than the clans.

15. (C) CODEL Payne presented four initiatives to the ARS representatives: 1) negotiate a political settlement; 2) creation of zones of tranquility; 3) establish a one month humanitarian cease-fire, and 4) renounce terrorism. Sharif agreed to the principles of negotiating a political settlement and the creation of zones of tranquility. The ARS representatives were opposed to a humanitarian cease-fire, believing it would allow the TFG and Ethiopian militaries to consolidate control of Somalia. Sharif said the ARS agreed in principle to anything allowing humanitarian assistance to be provided, adding that the dispute over a cease-fire was merely a technical issue.

16. (C) Sharif was adamant the ARS was not a terrorist organization, did not have ties to terrorist organizations, and was never a threat to its neighbors or the U.S. (Note: In a January 11 VOA interview, Sharif stated the ARS had severed ties with al-Shabaab. End Note). He said that the ARS officially condemns all terrorist acts, and the ARS will cooperate with the U.S. in the war on terror, if the U.S. helps against terrorist acts committed in Somalia by the Ethiopian military.

17. (C) Comment: The leaders of the ARS seem to have little interest in operating within the framework of the TFG and are openly working toward its ouster. In a side conversation with A/PolOff before the meeting, both Dheeg and Ahmed stated that the TFG was "an entity" conceived by foreigners and that

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it exists only with the support of Ethiopian and AU troops. ARS statements regarding the so-called "failed U.S. policies" in the region are in synch with that of their Eritrean hosts, but their willingness to communicate directly with the U.S. over the future of Somalia and terrorism is somewhat encouraging.

18. (U) This message has been coordinated with Embassy Nairobi.
MCMULLEN